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REVIEWS: Professional Materials

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REVIEWS

Professional Materials

Clear Thinking: A Practical Introduction.

Written by Hy Ruchlis with Sandra Oddo.

Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo NY 14215.

ISBN: 0-87975-594-6. 271 pp. 1990. US\$15.95.

Reviewed by Ronald A. Crowell
Western Michigan University

Among the plethora of books on thinking and thinking skills that have been published in the past few years, *Clear Thinking: A Practical Introduction*, by Hy Ruchlis with Sandra Oddo, is a welcome addition. This is a completely revised and updated version of the book originally published in 1962.

As the wonderfully insightful foreword by scientist and author Isaac Asimov points out, we all can think but we all cannot *think clearly*. The point of this useful book is how to use your mind to think clearly and effectively when confronted by a world where thinking stereotypically and emotionally seems to be the norm.

The ability to reason and to think critically is essential to our everyday living, especially in this complex, transitional period in the late twentieth century. Yet as young people try to cope with the realities of forging a productive, fulfilling life in a technological age, they are confronted with mountains of information through that technology. We are all presented with a huge amount of information, often deliberately distorted, which must be sorted, selected and reasoned about if we are to think clearly.

Ruchlis and Oddo offer a practical guide to help readers overcome their muddy or stereotypical or emotional thinking in the face of so much information. The book is in the mold of several books of earlier vintage which focus on the reasoning process and common errors in reasoning, including jumping to conclusions, drawing false analogies, and conforming to others' opinions and prejudices. The chapter on the nature of facts and how they are verified is a short but especially good foundation for the succeeding chapters on the reasoning process and language and reasoning, and the six chapters on errors in reasoning. The style, the up-to-date examples, and the anecdotes make the book pertinent in today's world.

Clear Thinking is a refreshing review for anyone interested in this important topic. The author and his colleague have done an excellent job of making a good older book current. It should prove to be a helpful resource for anyone who wants to think about their own thinking, and, in particular, for teachers who want to supplement their course content with examples and activities for students.

Books for Children

Cherries and Cherry Pits.

Written and illustrated by Vera B. Williams.

Greenwillow Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-10478-9. 1991. Softcover. US\$3.95.

Reviewed by Sue Coker
Western Michigan University

Cherries and Cherry Pits is a treasure. Bideemmi, an industrious young artist, has a vision – a colorful vision of families, the many ways of caring, and of hope for her future. Bideemmi shares her imagination in intimate detail. The brightly

colored, simple drawings of fathers, brothers, neighbors and friends sharing good times (and cherries) captivate and enchant the reader. This book makes one want to do three things: 1) go *immediately* to the store to purchase a huge bag of cherries, 2) buy a brand new set of multi-colored markers, and 3) settle in with a child to carefully read this book together.

SONGBOOKS

Down By The Bay. Written by Raffi.

Illustrated by Nadine Westcott. Crown Publishers, Inc., 225 Park Avenue South, New York NY 10003. ISBN: 0-517-56644-3. 1987.

In A Cabin In A Wood. Adapted by Darcie McNally.

Illustrated by Robin Michal Koontz. Cobblehill/Dutton Publishing, New York NY 10003. ISBN: 0-525-65035-0. 1991.

The Lady With The Alligator Purse and Skip To My Lou.

Both adapted and illustrated by Nadine Westcott.

Little, Brown and Company, 34 Beacon Street, Boston MA 02106. ISBN: 0-316-93135-7 and 0-316-93137-3, respectively. 1989.

The Wheels On The Bus. Adapted by Maryann Kovalski.

Little, Brown and Company, 34 Beacon Street, Boston MA 02106.
ISBN: 0-316-50256-1. 1987.

Reviewed by Kathy H. Barclay
Western Illinois University

The language of song is a natural, joyful language. When combined with literacy development, through the use of song-picture books, the process of beginning reading and writing is as natural and joyful as a song. Here are five popular song-picture books for integrating rhyme, reason and song into the entire early childhood curriculum.

Down By The Bay is but one of many of Raffi's wonderfully creative songs that have been published in book form. Nadine

Westcott illustrates the whimsical verses with the detailed drawings and pastel colors that have become her trademark in recent years. *Down By The Bay* will delight children as they read and sing the nonsensical rhymes about the animals that live “down by the bay.” Like so many song-picture books, *Down By The Bay* can be a springboard into writing as young children are encouraged to develop additional verses for the song.

The adaptation of the familiar song/fingerplay, *In A Cabin In A Wood*, is a delightful combination of old and new. The lyrics “In a cabin in the woods, a little man at the window stood...” are included in the song-picture book, but the reader is in for a surprise as more and more animals come “banging at the door.” Finally, in desperation, the little man paints a black stripe down the back of a cat and lets the “skunk” in. Naturally, all of the other animals quickly decide to depart from the little man and his home. The illustrations are cleverly done, as each page gives a picture clue for the animal that will next visit the little man.

Older readers will quickly recognize the well-known song and jumprope jingle “in came the doctor, in came the nurse, in came the lady with the alligator purse” when they read Nadine Westcott’s new version of *The Lady With the Alligator Purse*. The illustrations are absolutely delightful... right down to the purse that is drawn to resemble a real alligator! Young children will love the fact that in this version, the lady with the alligator purse overrules the doctor and the nurse with her prescription for pizza... a “medicine” that immediately cures the sick child in the story. Also illustrated by Nadine Westcott is the traditional version of *Skip To My Lou*. The detailed illustrations portray life on the farm while the young boy is in charge during his parents’ brief absence. The animals invade the farmhouse, wreaking havoc everywhere they turn. Everything goes topsy-turvy, including the sheep, who decide to unzip their wool suits and take a bath in the bathtub. Finally, “It’s a quarter ‘till two,” and the animals help get everything back in order, just in the nick of time! Like most song-picture books, the sheet music is printed on a separate page in the book. This is a delightful book for kids of all ages.

Who doesn't remember singing while performing the motions to *The Wheels On The Bus*? In this delightful version of the popular old song, two sisters are on their way home after a shopping trip with grandma. As they wait at the bus stop, they sing the familiar tune. Unfortunately, they get so involved in their song that they miss the bus! Oh, well, not to worry... they simply take a taxi, instead.

Three Recommended Children's Books

The Black Snowman.

Written by Phil Mendez; illustrated by Carole Byard.

Scholastics, 730 Broadway, New York NY 10003.

ISBN: 0-590-40553-5. 1989. Softcover. 46 pp. US\$4.95.

Earth Alive! Written and compiled by Sandra Markle.

Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-09360-4. 1991. Hardcover. 38pp. US\$14.95.

When the Woods Hum

Written by Joanne Ryder; illustrated by Catherine Stock.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-07057-4. 1990. Hardcover. 28 pp. US\$13.95.

Reviewed by Mark Neidlinger

Western Michigan University

Heritage and tradition speak loudly in *The Black Snowman*, a modern folktale written by Phil Mendez. The Black Snowman comes to life holding a brilliantly colored African cloth. This cloth, known as a kente, holds magical strength from the long ago dispersed Ashanti tribe. The cloth enables young Jacob to develop his sense of worth, and create his survival strengths in a world where he feels himself to be different. The illustrations are composed in colored chalk. Textures and colors are electric with energy, lending richness and depth to this story. There is a clear sense of African American heritage in this handsome book.

Earth Alive! is a fascinating look at the Earth's surface. Exciting photographs and interesting research have led Sandra Markle to create a book that in many aspects is a work of art. How exciting for children and adults to see the changes that are so slowly occurring in our earth — the effects of erosion which are clear and undeniable after viewing this book. Though the study of geology may heretofore have seemed like drudgery, *Earth Alive!* has made science come alive, and enabled us to sense clearly the rhythms of the earth.

When the Woods Hum speaks to its audience about the love of nature and the families that live within the boundaries of the woods. This story takes us through the development of the cicadas — through the birth and growth of families of these insects and through the life span of their generations. The scientific structure blends beautifully with Catherine Stock's very detailed watercolor illustrations. There is a sense of pattern in this book that provides us with a glimpse of the natural flow of life. Like so many new books on the market, *When the Woods Hum* provides an extension of the text through an author's note, as well as an ending graph which provides a synopsis of the text; these enriching features are welcome.

Materials reviewed are not endorsed by *Reading Horizons* or Western Michigan University. The content of the reviews reflects the opinion of the reviewers whose names or initials appear with the reviews.

To submit an item for potential review, send to Kathryn K. Welsch, Reviews Editor, *Reading Horizons*, Reading Center and Clinic, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

Content Area Literature for Young People

reviewed by Jeanne M. Jacobson
Western Michigan University

Galaxies and Earthquakes.

Both written by Seymour Simon.

Galaxies: Mulberry Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-10992-6. 1991. Softcover. 32 pp. US\$5.95.

Earthquakes: Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016. ISBN: 0-688-09633-6. 1991. Hardcover. 32 pp. US\$14.95.

Clearly written text in *Galaxies* accompanies, or is superimposed upon, elegant color photographs, some of which include labels and measurement guides — literally a stellar presentation of scientific concepts. Maps, graphs, and dramatic photographs illuminate both scientific explanations and history in *Earthquakes*. Outstanding text sensibly concludes with a note on safety precautions.

What Neat Feet!

Written by Hana Machotka.

Morrow Junior Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-09474-0. 1991. Hardcover. Unpaginated. US\$13.95.

Intriguing foot photos are followed by photographs and descriptions of the animals to which the feet belong — a delightful way to increase understanding of animal adaptations.

The Discovery of the Americas.

Written by Betsy and Giulio Maestro.

Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.

ISBN: 0-688-06837-5. 1991. Hardcover. 48pp. US\$14.95.

Once again the Maestros show themselves truly masters in the presentation of history for younger readers. *The Discovery of the Americas* places Columbus' expedition within a historical context stretching back into prehistory — when a land bridge linked what are now the continents of Asia and North America — and including preceding and subsequent expeditions in time periods ranging from the sixth century A.D. to the colonization of America. Beautiful illustrations include maps, and pictures of artifacts from the old world and the new.